

LETTER

TO

MR. JOHN ATLEY,
LATE PREACHER, BOOK STEWARD,
AND
CHAPEL STEWARD

TO THE

REV. MR. JOHN WESLEY

SETTING FORTH

HIS INGRATITUDE

TO THAT GREAT AND VENERABLE SERVANT OF
JESUS CHRIST,

ALSO

HIS ILL TREATMENT OF THE AUTHOR,
CONTRARY TO ALL CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

BY

THOMAS BETHELL

"LOVE WITHOUT DISSIMULATION."

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

And may be had of all the Bookfellers in Town and Country.

M.DCC.LXXXVIII.

[Price Four Pence.]

LETTER

TO

MR. JOHN ALLEY

THE BRANCH BOOK STEWARD

AND

CHIEF STEWARD

MR. JOHN W. WEST

CHIEF STEWARD

THE BRANCH BOOK STEWARD

TO THE BRANCH BOOK STEWARD

THE BRANCH BOOK STEWARD

AND

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

THOMAS BETHUNE

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

CHIEF STEWARD

[Signature]

LETTER, &c.

SIR,

YOUR present conduct is of such a nature and complection that it must appear, in the eyes of all good men, deeply tinctured with the greatest selfishness, and basest ingratitude: I therefore think myself loudly called upon to take up my pen, and lay before the public what are my thoughts concerning it. It is a common saying, Where there is no gratitude, there is no grace; for, "to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

I wish, first, to remind you of those great obligations you lie under to the Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY, that your ingratitude may appear in its proper light.—Many years ago he took you from poverty and

want, (*i. e.* seven shillings per week); had you placed among the number of his preachers, and sent you into different parts of these kingdoms to deliver the great truths of the Gospel to his people; thus suffering you to act in that line of life you thought yourself called to fill, he upheld you by his influence among them, and if you was injured in any respect, he defended you: thus has he kept you upon your legs, and caused you to attain to a very high degree of respectability among his friends; and at length, when you was weary of a travelling life, he entrusted you with that important place you lately filled: so that it is plain you were honoured through his honour, respected through his respect, and loved by the people for his sake; as the whole body of Methodists in his connection, knowing in what manner he placed you among the princes of his people, regarded and loved you through the medium of him that was your father and your friend — But what a return have you made to him for those numerous favours conferred on you! There was sufficient reason to believe you would have had his interest wholly at heart; that it would have been your study, your delight, to promote the cause of God in his hands; and that you would have been the first man in the kingdom upon every occasion to defend his character; that if there was any necessity, you, even at the hazard or loss of life, would have exerted all your powers and faculties in so good a cause: but, how far have you

you been from acting in the above manner! it has been quite the reverse! as it is plain that whilst you made an outward profession of promoting it, you was secretly employed in doing all you could to destroy that union and harmony that did subsist between them; and by the most diabolical deception made use of that guile you had learned from the father of lies, to sap it to the foundation, and if possible to destroy that glorious building which has been erecting, at so vast a labour and expence, during the long continuance of fifty years, by undermining its very foundations, and renching from the building one of its corner stones. (*For the nature of this I wish to refer the public to the pamphlet lately published, on that subject, by Dr. Thomas Coke.*)

How inconsistent is this conduct with that boasted honesty you seemed to exult in at those times when you appeared to promote God's cause in the hands of the Methodists, from whom you received your daily support for these twenty years. Little did that aged servant of God, who has grown grey in his service, think, he was fostering a viper in his bosom, that, having been warmed by his heat, would do all it could to thrust its sting into his heart; but, by the help of God, you will find he will shake you from your gripe into the fire, when you are cast out to the loathing of your person, and become a stink in the nostrils of all good men.

What

What a depth of the most secret hypocrisy does, and will appear in the whole of your late conduct, when it is considered in its proper light. — The Rev. Mr. Wesley appoints you to a place of trust and influence, believing you to be an honest man, and that his cause was in good hands when in yours; but you take the advantage of the good opinion he had formed of you, in a clandestine manner to injure the man who was your friend, by making use of your delegated influence to hurt a cause you professed with your tongue to support to the utmost stretch of your power. Thus you concealed your cloven foot till you saw your opportunity to throw off the mask; like satan you transformed yourself into an angel of light, but now you have thrown off the white veil, and made it manifest to all good men what your real character is. This is plain from that hypocritical manner you have acted in, when you obtained from the Rev. Mr. Wesley, that the trustees of Dewsbury House should have a power to chuse or reject a preacher under certain restrictions. Here you shewed your diabolical art! You, by your subtle insinuations, have inadvertently drawn a good man to part with that power that God, and the nature of the Methodist connection, had entrusted him with; since there is not the least doubt but those people who so liberally contributed to the building of Dewsbury Preaching House, gave their money with an intention it should be settled on the same plan as other preaching

preaching houses in the same connection. Does it not appear that you have laid yourself out to defraud the connection of a part of their property? If this is not swindling, it is a brat of its begetting. But this deception should not have been made use of to your enemy, much less to your benefactor and friend, as you could not but know that such a father as he is, if bereaved of his children, must and would feel great pain of mind. Had you no respect remaining in you to so great an instrument in the hands of God, as even his enemies must confess him to be, if they only consider with what indefatigable zeal he has laboured these fifty years past; that like his great Master, he has patiently endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; and, what is still more grievous to be borne! the lifting up of the heel of many of his children against him! You should have remembered that he was the very man God made use of as the first instrument to begin the present glorious reformation in these lands, and not basely to have deserted him when in the decline of life, in his last stage, nor thus excite a spirit of separation in the minds of the people, that must alarm the whole body, and hurt the feelings of him who was your friend; who, in the eighty-seventh year of his age, still continues to preach, going about doing good, I believe much beyond his strength. Can you think that God will bless an undertaking founded on the highest ingratitude and injustice:

God

God is not only the God of Love, but is Love itself, and cannot act inconsistent with himself, by any of those numerous agents his wisdom thinks fit to make use of to bring his gracious purposes to that maturity and fitness for action, that becomes the wisdom and goodness which constitutes the Divine Being. From the above observations it is no hard matter to infer from what spirit you have acted, as it is plain it was not from that spirit of love which is and must be universal, and of course thinketh and acteth no evil to any creature under Heaven, (not even our enemies, much less to those that our own feelings declare are our friends and benefactors.) It will now plainly appear to all men that you have acted from a spirit of self-love, which is from beneath, and acts in opposition to that love which is from above; this self-love is the rock on which you have split, and if not subdued and done away in you, must and will sink you lower than the grave, as nothing that defileth can enter into the kingdom of God. Now, when this self-love is destroyed in the soul, such a person is free from that vile deception that so apparently appears in you; for love cannot injure any man, in thought, word, or deed. How plain a truth is this; the most simple can comprehend it; so that you are without excuse, as you could not but know you was acting wrong, when you excited a spirit of separation in the minds of those people over a part of which you now preside, there cannot be a doubt but

but that in this whole affair you made use of much guile. Now this is not of God; and I know but of two spirits by which the sons of men are actuated, that of God, and that of the devil: from hence I must conclude that the trustees of Dewsbury House have made a strange choice, by rejecting a man governed and actuated by the spirit of love, and of consequence by the spirit of God, and chusing a man governed and actuated by a spirit of self-love, and of consequence by the spirit of the devil—Is it possible a work founded on so bad a basis can prosper? — This I leave to the judgement of those people of all denominations who fear God.—Thus have I fully proved you to be a man guilty of the highest ingratitude to him who has been your principal friend and benefactor for many years; which plainly indicates you are destitute of that grace that changes the heart, that renews the spirit, that sanctifies the soul, and fits us for glory.

I now proceed to consider in what manner you have acted inconsistent with the character of an honest man and a christian, respecting myself. And if I do not prove you to be a slanderer, tale bearer, an injurious person, and a defamer of your brother's reputation, contrary to all truth, for no cause whatever, then let my name be stigmatized for ever. I shall begin by proving you to be a man destitute of feeling, and of consequence, destitute of grace, from the treatment you have given

B

myself.

myself.—In August, 1784, when first I came to London to reside, the Rev. Mr. Wesley sent me an order on you for twenty pounds. I presented it to you for payment, and at the same time told you that myself and family were here at expence, spending what little we had; and that I wanted the money to get into some way of bread. You then turned from me with disdain, saying, “ You would not make my wants yours, nor feel for me ;” and kept me waiting on you for a full month, to my great injury, before you gave me even a small part, and the remainder you kept back till the Rev. Mr. Wesley returned to London; nor did you pay it till I made application to him, which was in October. That expression, *You would not feel for me*, fully convinced me you had but little grace, if any, as a real christian will most assuredly feel his brother’s woe. That heart which is made soft by renewing love, melts at the distress of others—But this is not yours! When I returned to my family from your house, I could not refrain exclaiming, What an unkind, unfeeling man is John Atley!

Sometime after, I went to you and others to beg something for a William Tice. You asked me what was the name of him I thus begged for. I told you, Tice. You then said, William Tice, who cheated me of five guineas; he is a bad man, and it is no wonder that such men as he should
come

come to want. This, of course, made me look cool on Tice, which caused him to write that abominable, lying letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley concerning me, as I had refused to beg a pulpit and preach a collection sermon for him, chiefly on account of what so *great* a man had said respecting him. I was quite ignorant of this letter at the time I requested that there might be a hearing between me and Tice before Mr. Henry Moore. You had this letter in your possession at the time of this hearing, as Mr. Wesley left it in your hands that I might have an opportunity of justifying myself, as he told me himself afterwards. After all, you came to this hearing, taking part with the same Tice whose character you had stigmatized to me a few days before that, but you never made mention of this letter. You then told me, it was true, Mr. Wesley had at different times given me orders on you for money, but that it should be your care to prevent it for the time to come. Though you made it your business to conceal the above letter from my knowledge, contrary to Mr. Wesley's intention, yet you handed it about among your friends, to the injury of my character. In this manner you displayed your brotherly love, by endeavouring to hurt me in the most tender part, by stopping my public usefulness. Was not this a breach of the highest trust, as it tended to destroy the character of a public preacher of the Gospel, without giving him an opportunity

of justifying himself?—If this be not defamation and slander, I know not the meaning of words.

I shall now draw a parallel between you and two worthies of old, whose characters you seem to have well studied and imitated, I mean Ahithophel and Judas; the former gave counsel against the Lord's anointed, joined himself to his rebellious son, and by his counsel endeavoured to dethrone the man of God's choice—This is just your case. You, by secret connivance, gave counsel against the Rev. Mr. Wesley, who is and has been so visibly owned of God, and for many years been acknowledged as the head of the largest collection of Christian people who have been joined together since the apostolic age. Judas betrayed the innocent blood of the Lord of Life and Glory—You have acted in the same manner by one of his poor servants. Our blessed Saviour had done nothing to Judas to incur his displeasure, neither have I done to you; and yet you have laid yourself out to hurt me in the tenderest part. Oh! what a dreadful thing it is to be devoid of all these tender feelings that ought, and really do appear in every gracious soul. From the first time you knew me in London you have been my enemy, and that for no cause. I remember in the year 1784, the Rev. Mr. Wesley, by letter, desired me to go to you and request you candidly to tell me the true reason of the preachers' disgust against me; and

and you then told me it was, because I had given opposition to Joseph Pilmore, in Dublin. But if you had been as faithful to the Methodist cause as you should have been, were you an honest man, you would have been my friend on that very account, as it amounted to a full proof to you, that I was the Rev. Mr. Wesley's friend ; one, who at the expence of property and character was determined to exert all my powers to keep his people, if possible, together. But I make no doubt your scheme was then concerted, and only wanted the opportunity to be matured, for you to throw off the veil. And you was not master enough of yourself to conceal your malice against one, whom you had sufficient reason to believe was entirely different from you in principle.

If I had been actuated by a spirit of revenge against you, I should have addressed you publicly long since, but your ill treatment to me lay dormant in my mind upwards of two years. When I was informed of your *base, wicked conduct* respecting the Rev. Mr. Wesley, it fired my soul, and was more than I could well bear : I then resolved to publish the whole, in order to prevent your imposing on mankind in future.

I think it will be right on this occasion to let all men know the real character of the aforementioned Tice, whom you stigmatized to me, and afterwards

wards came to defend, to my prejudice. This I cannot better do than by inserting at large a writing sent by the members of the Rev. Mr. Brittain's Meeting, to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley; of which I retained a copy—It is as follows :

‘ London, March the 1st, 1785.

‘ To whomsoever it may concern,

‘ WE whose names are underwritten, members
 ‘ of the Rev. Mr. Brittain's Meeting, Church
 ‘ Lane, Whitechapel, some of whom having been
 ‘ requested by the Rev. Mr. Blunt, well known
 ‘ among us, to inquire into a dispute between the
 ‘ Rev. Mr. Bethell, and one Mr. Tice, with re-
 ‘ spect to many charges brought by Tice against
 ‘ Bethell, reflecting on his character as a moral
 ‘ honest man, as a Christian, and as a preacher of
 ‘ the Gospel; we do declare that we have, to the
 ‘ utmost of our power, examined the whole of the
 ‘ dispute between them without any partiality what-
 ‘ soever, on both sides, with the many charges
 ‘ brought by Tice against Bethell, and Bethell's
 ‘ defence; and we do declare that the charges
 ‘ brought are injurious, false, and groundless, he
 ‘ having no foundation for any of his assertions,
 ‘ he contradicting himself in all his charges against
 ‘ Bethell, which could arise from nothing but his
 ‘ own wicked imaginations, by putting false con-
 ‘ structions on every expression, to hurt an honest
 ‘ man,

' man, and to prevent his usefulness as a preacher
 ' of the Gospel. We have also, in our opinion,
 ' from the evidence given to us by others, reason to
 ' think that while Tice was in pretended friend-
 ' ship with Bethell and his family, he was employed
 ' about the neighbourhood in vilifying him. Nei-
 ' ther his word nor his oath is worth regarding.
 ' The aforesaid Tice was a member with us, but
 ' was withdrawn from us for his wicked immora-
 ' lity in such conduct, which from delicacy of mind
 ' we cannot insert, but are ready and willing to
 ' satisfy any inquiring person whose business it is
 ' so to do. We write this from no other motive
 ' but to satisfy an honest man, and make his mind
 ' easy, which we believe is our duty so to do.

' BENJAMIN LEWIS, Tallow Chandler,
 ' Fenchurch Street.

' GEORGE SIMPSON, Salesman, West
 ' Street, Spital-Fields Market.'

' This is the *worthy* person whose cause you ex-
 ' erted all your power and influence to promote,
 ' against one who had been publicly useful for years
 ' in that connection to which you seemed to belong,
 ' and from which you drew your constant support.
 ' But you found this did not answer your intention,
 ' as I still continued both a member and preacher in
 ' the connection, notwithstanding all that you had

done: but when Mr. Henry Moore was gone, who knew me better than his successor, you worked on him (Mr. Samuel Bradburn) all you could, that I might be compelled to quit that body of Christian people to whom my whole heart had been joined for full thirty-eight years—How cruel was this conduct! How much of that infernal spirit that sets a man against his wife, a father against his child, a wife against her husband, and children against their parents, is here displayed! And as the smallest wheel will set the largest machine in motion when set in motion itself, so you by your example and influence have set many of both the preachers and people against a person who, more than once, hath suffered the loss of all things for that connection whose union *you* have endeavoured to break, by your subtil counsel. — “ Shall I not visit for “ these things, saith the Lord ? ” But as God enabled me so to act that you could not have any just cause for complaint against me, you had recourse to the father of lies—It is his interest to make use of such instruments as you, whose credit and influence, both with preachers and people, *was* very great, therefore your word would most undoubtedly be taken against one who was a stranger, and of course had not many friends. What you was about to speak, though it was a breach of the ninth command, had no weight with you, as you thought it would effectually answer your purpose.—The very remembrance of it shocks my soul! It is impossible that

that I should relate this black and wicked device without feeling all that horror, consternation, and surprise which such a deep laid, diabolical scheme deserves: you told Mr. Samuel Bradburn, ' that ' Mr. George Happlewight had said I was a swindler, and that he had a mind to have me tried ' upon the swindling act, not regarding the expence.' This Mr. Bradburn told me in the preachers' meeting, before them all, and at the same time was so candid as to acquaint me that you was his informer. Any man may judge my indignation and amazement must have been beyond conception; yet the Lord gave me patience to bear this great trial with tolerable fortitude, so that no improper reply came out of my mouth. The next morning I went to Happlewight, and asked him if he had spoken to any person in that manner of, or concerning me. His answer was, That if I required it, he would make affidavit before any magistrate that he had never spoken of me in any such manner; or that, if I desired it, he would go with me to the preachers' meeting, and there declare publicly that he had never spoken any such words. However, as I saw it would be impossible for me to enjoy peace of mind there while so wicked a man as John Atley continued in the place, I withdrew myself, and left my case to him that judgeth righteously; believing that God, in his own due time, would cause my righteousness to appear as a lamp that burneth.

Thus have I fully made it manifest to all men, that you are an ungrateful man to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, whom every person knows has been your best friend; that by fraud, hypocrisy, and deceit, you have caused a part of the people of Dewsbury to break off from the connection to which they belonged, that yourself might become a head over them. Without any just cause that you would, or could assign, have also been my enemy, hurt my public usefulness, disturbed my peace of mind, turned the affection of many of my friends from me, and injured the cause of God in my hands. But permit me for the above conduct of yours to recite two reasons; the first is, because I gave opposition to Joseph Pilmore, and prevented his dividing the Rev. Mr. Wesley's people in Dublin. The second is, because the Rev. Mr. Wesley gave me several orders upon you at various times for money, and as you *carried the bag*, you could not bear the thought of parting with the shining ore, How inadvertently has that good man been led in his choice of *you* for the above purpose! But I have an emollient for the present worthy man in your late office, who, I am informed, refused your place, though several times solicited thereto: until the last time the Rev. Mr. Wesley wrote to him for that purpose, he added, "*You will excuse blots, for I have blotted it with my tears!*" Upon which, *Matthias* resolved to take your place, at any rate.—The Rev. Mr. Wesley seems determined to have

have a Judas no more. Your end has been answered, as you have been the cause of separating from his brethren one who has been a friend and well-wisher to the Methodist connection for more than forty years; who was thirty-two years ago appointed by the Rev. Mr. Wesley as a travelling preacher; who hath laboured with the approbation of the people, and whose word the Lord hath owned many times.

I pray God lay not these sins to your charge, but cause such a keen conviction to take place within you, as may be productive of the most salutary consequences, by bringing you to the true knowledge of yourself and God; then, and not till then, may you bring your gift to the altar; after you are reconciled to your offended father, the Rev. Mr. Wesley, whom you have grievously injured! and me, whose peace of mind you have much disturbed, whose public labours you endeavoured to put a stop to; and whose character you have so basely vilified. It often has amazed me how so wicked a man as you should dare to stand between the living and the dead, after such outrages against God's commandments. I much fear you have stifled that monitor within, and can wipe your mouth, and say you have done no wrong, like the false prophets of old. This is most certainly the case, as you have continued to

persevere in your conduct respecting me—Is it not, then, proved to a demonstration, first, that you are a man capable of the worst of crimes; that you are ungrateful to your friend and benefactor, who at all times has done you good; and that as sin is of a hardening nature, you have gone on from bad to worse, till at length your conscience became so hard, that you made no scruple of the black deed of breach of trust, in the worst sense of the word, for he that robs me of gold is an honest man, when compared to him who deprives me of my good name, and hinders me to improve that dispensation of the Gospel committed to my care. That you have slandered me, can be proved by many witnesses; and that through the means of your slander I have suffered much both in my mind and person, is a truth that cannot be controverted. How, then, is such a man as you are fit to take on you the cure of souls, whose own soul is full of the contagion of sin!—This is a mystery I cannot comprehend. My character being thus hurt through your influence, has been a great hindrance to my ministerial labours for more than two years. But lately a Reverend Divine, when in company with the Rev. Mr. Wesley, asked him, If there was any charge against me respecting my moral character: Mr. Wesley answered, “There was not, but that he would not be ruled.” I suppose this answer referred to my

my preaching in pulpits that did not belong to him, which many times I have done whilst I was in his connection, and which is not common for his preachers to do.

I hope, my dear brother, you will in future desist from such hypocritical conduct, as your character has been much injured by it: if you do not, "Your soul will never ascend up to Heaven, like *" inflammable air,"* (to use one of your own picked phrases); or should it attempt to ascend, *like inflammable air*, with poor Lunardi you will experience a rapid fall. Alas! Sir, *inflammable air* cannot ascend above the thick atmosphere of the earth into those purer regions.—Indeed, your past conduct too much resembles *inflammable air*, which, though when confined in a *large* balloon, looks very pretty; when it bursts, stinks to suffocation; obscures the light, and deceives the depending mortal, letting him fall to earth again.

Now my brethren of Dewsbury, for such I desire to esteem you, receive a word of advice from one who loves the cause of God, and sincerely desires your happiness, both in time and to all eternity. It is my earnest wish and prayer to God that your souls may prosper: and that this may be the case, return to your brethren; "let brotherly love continue;" then you will find an increase

crease of grace; for our God is not a God of disorder and confusion, but the God of order, of love, peace, concord, harmony, and joy. "As ye
 "have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye
 "in him." I appeal to yourselves, to your own feelings, Have you as much life and peace in your souls now as you had before this late separation took place? You will answer, You have not. This, I am sure, is the case with you; but it need not continue to be so. Shake yourselves from this drowsy lethargic state; make use of those powers that God has given you; determine to return to your aged father, and I am persuaded that, after the example of the God he serves, he will meet you a great way off. I know by experience, that the Christians in his connection are the best body of people in those lands. And though it may be possible that some among them are hypocrites, yet those tares will grow up with the wheat till the Lord of the harvest come. As to my part, I wish from my heart that all mankind were thus united in the same bond of love. You hear, my brethren, what pain of mind this man has been the cause of my feeling; but it is impossible for you to form any idea adequate to what I have felt on those occasions; yet, hitherto the Lord has supported me under all my afflictions; and if I am instrumental in his hand by persuading you to return to your brethren, how will my heart rejoice even in the midst

midst of my sufferings, and shall esteem them sent to me of God for your sakes. Let not the people of Dewsbury in any respect be instrumental in causing the grey hairs of our aged and reverend Father to be brought down with sorrow to the grave!!—So prays one who loves him for his Lord's sake.

THOMAS BETHELE.

London,
October 4, 1788.

